

Education Governance Responses
Springfield Meeting (2/12/07) - Springfield High School Cafeteria

30 Attendees (facilitated by George Appenzeller)

Question #1: What are the advantages and disadvantages of the present education governance system in your community?:

Advantages

Plurality of ideas
A town school can go its own way in some areas
Local control of finances
Provides community support
More responsive to student needs
Many different board members with many different experiences
Centers of excellence – One size fits all is not a good idea
Gives small towns a voice in government
People know where the money goes in a small town
People are more likely to know board members/approach them
Current system allows average working citizen to be a board member
Allows for K-12 coordination
Produces top rated educational systems and top student achievement in U.S.
Greater participation does matter
More buy-in – less top down
Administrators more beholden to the communities they serve
More parent and community participation in education

Disadvantages

Build consensus when needed
Unnecessary duplication
Economies of scale for purchasing, buses, etc.
Getting quality board members
Superintendent issues (multiple) – time management
Boards can go in multiple directions
Unequal representation & budget support in S.U.
Difficult to consolidate schools
More expensive
Specialists- Elementary music, etc. are part time; itinerants spread thin
Redundancies – each board has its own agenda/conflicting goals
Will force more districts

Question #2: What are the advantages and disadvantages of the school district model suggested by Commissioner Cate in his White Paper?

Advantages

All students owned by all boards
Easier to build consensus (if needed)
Politically useful for Cate
Superintendent burnout would be reduced

Fewer superintendents and so more qualified candidates
More unified curriculum
Universal health insurance for VT
Consolidation voluntary & local option
Economics: transportation, property maintenance, food services, mental health
Combined professional development
Superintendents can focus on one district
Small schools have a larger pool of shared services

Disadvantages

Less ownership of elementary schools
Towns can't negotiate separately
Logistics of transition: salaries/contracts, curriculum/busing/calendar
Individuals lose influence
No local control of money
Weighted vote problematic when one town is larger
Plurality of ideas is reduced
Loss of parental & community support/participation
Domination of SU board by most populous town
Loss of decision-making power of small towns
Limiting number of school board members limits vision and ideas
Closure of small schools
Moving government further from local citizens
Harder to get qualified school board members
No advantage
Power Point board meetings
White male land owners
Has little or nothing to do with saving money, though in the end, I would wager it would increase the cost of administration.

Debrief Comments:

What we need to do is to find enabling ways to help people
State calendar
Regional/statewide teacher negotiations/contracts
Single business manager/superintendent for administration services – not for policies, curriculum, etc.
Joint purchasing in S.U.; joint purchasing or management agreements with neighboring SU
Lose ability to contact local government
The commissioner has not been specific enough about the plan. Will this save money? Where is the data? If we can save on building, where is the data?
The DOE needs to do their homework before presenting the plan
Local school boards can decide if they want to save money (how to spend their money)
Congrats to the commissioner for asking for input
Vermonters take time to make decisions, they do not make them in an evening
Parents and students need to be at the table
We need to keep town meetings
Many people watch school board meetings on TV. They feel part of the process.
Fewer regulations for state; bus, driver's ed., etc.
Money must follow mandates

Statewide teachers' contract

Thorough cost analysis: e.g. what is cost savings for this proposal? Why cut the volunteers?

What are the cost drivers – how know?

“Tinker” with this model before you scrap it.

How will this affect student learning? Shouldn't this be the focus?

What are we fixing?

Need details

Leave consolidation to local options: there are many instances where it is a good choice

In supervisory unions, consolidate appropriate services; purchasing, busing, etc.

A corporate or non-profit board is not a unit of democratic government; there is a real difference